BRULE RIVER STATE FOREST MASTER PLAN
FACT SHEET

Socio-Economics

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been charged by Wisconsin Statute 28.01 to provide leadership in "all matters pertaining to forestry with the jurisdiction of the state". The management of Wisconsin's designated state forests, such as the Brule River State Forest, is an important part of this leadership role. The Department has committed to managing these state forests using the principles of sustainable forestry. Sustainable forestry is defined as "the practice of managing dynamic forest ecosystems to provide ecological, economic, social and cultural benefits for present and future generations." (s.28.04(1), Wisc. Stats.). This fact sheet is intended to define the role and importance of the social and economic aspects of the management of the Brule River State Forest.

Forest resources provide the basis for much of the economic and social activity taking place in rural Wisconsin. This is particularly true in the northern parts of the state where tourism and wood products manufacturing provide mainstays to local economies. One role of the Brule River State Forest is to demonstrate how sustainable forestry can be used to generate these economic mainstays while providing significant ecological benefits as well.

As part of the master plan process, 2 levels of social and economic evaluation must occur. The first is to define how the BRSF can best demonstrate the use of sustainable forestry in providing socio-economic benefits and the second is to evaluate the socio-economic impacts of the proposed management alternatives. As part of the master planning effort, a joint project of the Department and University of Wisconsin – Extension examined the socio-economic variables within the forested region of Northwest Wisconsin in 1996-97 (Marcouiller and Mace 1999). In order to meet the statutory requirements of a regional analysis and to accurately reflect the movement of goods and services within an economic region, this analysis was conducted for a 12 county area in NW Wiscosin.

The project confirmed the importance o f the forest resource to the economic activity of the region. The forest products industry accounted for approximately 12% of the regional industrial output while tourism associated with forest based recreation provided another 7% of regional industrial output. The tourism sensitive economic sectors contributed 16% (21,119) of the region's jobs at an average annual salary of approximately $9,200. The wood products industry contributed 7%(9,094) of the region's jobs at an average annual salary of $24,800. In general, many of the tourism sector jobs are more seasonal or part time when compared to jobs in the wood products industry. On a regional scale, the forest based tourism and wood products industry's have developed simultaneously as important socio-economic factors in NW Wisconsin.

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Since forest resources provide both wood products and recreation related economic production, the compatibility of these uses must be examined to provide guidance to individual forest managers. In order to examine this issue, research into how forest-based recreationists view forests and forest management was conducted. The recreationists surveyed were divided into 3 groups based on their primary interest; hunters, motorized recreationists and passive recreationists. Within this region, hunters used private nonindustrial forest in greatest percentage while passive recreationists used public lands the most. The use preference by motorized users was less clear. When presented the statement; "I find forest-based recreation to be generally compatible with timber harvesting activities" most forest based recreationists surveyed agreed with the statement. Passive recreationists were least likely to agree with this statement with about one quarter of this group disagreeing with the statement. Most respondents from all groups were comfortable with small openings in the forests, believed that these openings have value to wildlife and agreed that timber harvesting was a legitimate use of forests. Overall, respondents were bothered by large forest openings and concerned that timber harvesting has impacts on water quality. The information provided by this research suggests that forests can be managed for the production of forest products and recreation simultaneously but that forest managers must continue to be diligent in implementing Best Management Practices for water quality and aesthetic management strategies.

The socio-economic aspects of forest management are important considerations in the development of the master plan for the Brule River State Forest. However, it is important to note that specific habitat management decisions on state forests are not designed to produce a specific monetary result for the state or any particular local business. Rather, through the use of sustainable forestry practices the Brule River State Forest can be an important tool for the Department of Natural Resources in demonstrating how forests can be managed to provide ecological, economic, social and cultural benefits for present and future generations.

Marcouiller, D and T. Mace. 1999. Forests and regional development – Economic impacts of woodland
use for recreation and timber in Wisconsin. U of Wis. – Extension pub. #G3694, 43 pp.

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